



REGION 6 REGIONAL RESPONSE TEAM (RRT) SEMI - ANNUAL REPORT

Period: July, 2003 – December, 2003

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

Major / Noteworthy Activities

Texas General Land Office Jurisdiction Change

Starting in September 2003, oil spills of less than 240 barrels originating from Exploration and Production Facilities and Pipelines, became the jurisdictional domain of the GLO. Previously, these types of spills fell within the scope of the Railroad Commission.

This change centralizes state jurisdiction for all maritime oil spills under the General Land Office and eliminates a potentially confusing duplication of effort on the parts of the two agencies.

The new rules, found in 31 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 19, will result in some minor changes for Exploration and Production and Pipeline Facility operators as the General Land Office will replace the Railroad Commission as state responders.

In addition, it is anticipated that the General Land Office will be on-scene for oil spills at a far greater frequency since it is fully prepared to launch its own vessels for access. Fortunately, the process for reporting spills won't change much as both agencies use the same toll free number.

Exploration and Production and Pipeline Facility operators are encouraged to contact the Oil Spill Prevention and Response Program with any questions they have regarding the rules changes and reporting oil spills on the Texas coast.

Marine Safety Office, New Orleans

On December 3, 2003, MSO New Orleans received a NRC report of a pipeline discharging crude oil into Barataria Bay, LA. The pipeline belonged to Exxon/Mobil, the owner, who then shut down all pipelines in the area. The Responsible Party (RP) notified the appropriate federal and state agencies, estimating approximately 15,000 gallons of oil was released into the Bay.

The area in question is a sensitive area for many types of water-fowl that are beginning to breed and nest. Coast Guard over-flights revealed some shoreline impact but could not identify any oiled wildlife. Approximately 20,000 feet of boom was used to protect the rest of the islands in the area.

The RP established a Unified Command in Raceland, LA and conducted skimming/booming operations from their Raceland Exxon/Mobil facility. The clean up operation went well with minimal damage/impact to the shoreline and wildlife.

Approximately seventy percent of the spilled product was recovered during the clean up process. The pipeline was repaired within four days.

Marine Safety Office, Morgan City

On December 2, 2003, MSO Morgan City small boat teams were conducting HIV boarding of M/V Sea Flower due to hazardous cargo, 736 metric tons of Class 1.1 explosives. Small boat team was re-routed when they sighted an explosion and fire on nearby dredge. Dredge Tom James had struck a twenty inch Natural Gas pipeline approximately 5-10 miles away.

All persons on board were safely evacuated from the dredge and transferred to nearby crew-boats. The ruptured pipeline was raised one foot out of the water between buoy 15/16 of the Atchafalaya River and continued to discharge Gas/Condensate.

The Responsible Party (RP) was identified as Gulf South Pipeline Company. The RP hired Clean Gulf Associates as its OSRO, deploying cleanup equipment to the scene. Over-flights reported a light sheen approximately one-quarter mile by twenty yards of non-recoverable product.

The RP contracted diver to survey the area and assess the pipeline damage. The river entrance remained closed to vessel traffic due to pipeline obstruction. There was no report of environmental or wildlife pollution in the area.

Sterling Chemical, Texas, City, TX

On November 3, 2003, 0700, Marine Safety Unit, Galveston, TX, was notified of an unknown problem occurring with the barge NMS1477 docked at Sterling Chemical Dock # 2 causing Starboard list. The barge was carrying 235,000 gallons of Sulfuric Acid. Later that same day, as plans were being made to lighter, the barge capsized making it impossible to lighter.

Garner Environmental was hired as the OSRO to conduct air and water monitoring. T & T Marine was hired to plan and develop a salvage plan for the operations. At the time of the capsizing, there were no reports of product release or personal injuries. Since capsizing, there has been no detection of H₂ gases in the water or air. VTS has required slow bell in the area and a safety zone has been established.

A Unified Command was established to discuss the situation and response measures to prevent environmental, health and safety issues. At 1500 the RRT 6 was convened and CDR Paul Thomas briefed the primary members on the situation. The primary response strategy was to lighter and salvage the barge. The RRT requested that a Salvage Plan be developed and submitted for review.

The Salvage Plan, new calculations, indicates it may be possible to slowly lift and roll the barge to the proper position for lightering. After several additional RRT 6 conference calls to discuss lightering options and environmental impact, the RRT recommended surface and subsurface monitoring to detect or determine rate of cargo leaking and if it safe for divers to enter the water.

Salvage crews began preparing rigging harnesses to right the barge that rolled over on it side. Crews finished connecting cables to assist in righting the barge. Upon certifying barge safety, lightering operations began. The remaining sulfuric acid inside the barge was pumped into the Bay.

The decision to pump the acid into the bay was a multi-agency call. Federal and State chemist stated that the sulfuric acid released into the bay would settle at the bottom of the waterway and would not harm or have a major impact on the marine life.

RRT Meetings

The RRT VI winter meeting (USCG) will be held in Lake Charles, LA on 27-28 January 2004.

Committee and Working Group Updates

On December 8, 2003, the RRT VI, Dispersant Subcommittee (Dr. Karolien Debusschere, State of Louisiana) held a conference call to further discuss the development for pursuing the potential expedited approval process for inshore/near-shore dispersant use. A “draft” plan was sent to each work group member for review and comment.

Several major issues were raised by the Department of the Interior. The issues were concerning wildlife, endangered species, and sensitive area protection. The committee worked through these issues and comments were incorporated into the draft plan. This plan will be presented to the RRT at the winter meeting in Lake Charles, LA.

II. GENERAL PREPAREDNESS AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

Training

VOSS Deployment Training In Missouri

The Coast Guard (D8) conducted a training exercise, September 5-6, 2003, utilizing its VOSS (Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System) in Cape Girardeau, Missouri AOR. Major participants in this exercise were USCG, (Gulf and Atlantic Strike Teams), M/V Pathfinder, USEPA, MSO Puducah, MSO St. Louis.

The decision was made that a single-sided deployment of the VOSS would be undertaken, with one section of the outrigger arm, flex-boom, and the skimmer deployed on the starboard side. Due to fast current in the Upper Mississippi River the M/V Pathfinder was not able to conduct skimming operation underway.

The vessel spudded down along the east bank of the river where eddies caused a back flow of current in an upriver direction. Support vessels inserted rice hulls in the water downstream from the vessel and let the back flowing current carry them to the deployed VOSS system. The boom and skimming operations were conducted for approximately two hours.

Exercise / Workshops

Salvage and Marine Firefighting Forum

The Eight Coast Guard District Marine Safety Response Branch identified Salvage and Marine Firefighting Preparedness as a high priority area to focus on during the oncoming years. The Response Branch identified that Salvage operations are typically lightly addressed or over-sighted in Marine Firefighting plans, the response branch also identified the need to address both issues an equal level and to have them addressed in a forum setting.

In other to gauge the response preparedness of the Ports under the Eighth Coast Guard District, the Response Branch proposed to the different Captains of the Port (COTP) an initiative to establish a baseline and measure the awareness.

Subsequently, this initiative was introduced and accepted by Area Committees in New Orleans, Houston, and Corpus Christi. Houston and New Orleans hosted the first two forums. Corpus Christi has committed to holding a forum in 2004. The initiative consisted of:

Conduct a series of Salvage and Marine Firefighting facilitated discussions at each of the Captain of the Port Zones (Coastal and Inland)

Have these discussions moderated by a trained and unbiased facilitator and led by a panel consisting of local/ regional responders with the assistance of regional/country wide subject matter experts (as identified by the cognizant COTP and local response community.)

Have the discussion focus primarily on Salvage and Marine Firefighting response efforts; with the vessel type and incident location selected or recommended by the local response community, and the type of fire scenario introduced and controlled by the local panel. Have the response discussion documented and feedback provided to different response communities.

Maintain the focus on Salvage & Marine Firefighting response capabilities keeping the scenarios relatively simple without criminal, terrorist activity involvement or massive search and rescue operations (i.e. from passenger Ship), but involving credible and challenging situations (Waterway closures, Hazmat, injuries, media coverage, etc.)

Upon completion of each forum, re-evaluate the initiative and pursue necessary activities to increase the local / regional response capabilities, and shared those activities with other COTP areas for their consideration.

Spill Of Opportunity Update

The Texas General Land Office (TGLO) sponsored Spill Of Opportunity project has completed all ESA Section Consultation requirements and have addressed all concerns from various federal agencies.

Both U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Fisheries Service agree and support that this test will have little or no effect on species in the area for a one time use of dispersants provided all operational parameters used in the proposal are followed. RRT 6 will be voting at the winter meeting in Lake Charles, LA for final approval of the project. We all expect an approval by the RRT.

MEXUS Update

On August 25-28, 2003, in Tampico, Mexico, Eighth Coast Guard District (m), led a multi-discipline MEXUS GULF joint response team (JRT) delegation to provide technical support to the Mexican JRT during the Mexican Navy led joint exercise.

The United States Gulf delegation consisted of members from the Department of the Interior, stakeholders (MMS and Fish & Wildlife), NOAA, DOD (NAVSUPSALV), USEPA, State of Texas (TGLO) and key Mexican government officials. This was the first time the Mexican officials used the Incident Command System (ICS), which resulted in a great success story.

The Coast Guard Cutter (CGC) CYPRESS provided direct support to the Mexican Navy led exercise. The CGC Cypress also served as an observation platform for regional Mexican VIPS and Evaluators for observation of the simulated oil spill and boom deployment operations. This MEXUS exercise was considered a success for both the Mexican and U.S. delegations.

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL PLANNING AND COORDINATION EFFORTS

On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) Pre-approved Guidelines To Decontaminate Vessels and Hard Structures

Regional Response Team (RRT) 6, in accordance with the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (40 CFR Part 300, Section 300.910), grants pre-authorization to all coastal OSC's for using surface washing agents in pre-identified area within Area Contingency Plans (ACP's), as defined by the "RRT 6 Emergency Response Pre-Approval Guidelines to Decontaminate Vessels and Hard Structures in Coastal Port Areas".

This pre-authorization is based on RRT 6 meeting in Fort Smith, Arkansas on June 18, 2003. These guidelines authorize the OSC's the use of surface washing agents under the following conditions: For a product to be used, it must be listed on the National Contingency Plan Product Schedule Listing.

Only pre-identified and approved port locations listed in or amended to your ACP are to be considered. Surface washing agents may be considered when conventional flushing techniques are inadequate in removing oil residues to the required cleanup standard or when cleanup time can be reduced such that a significant positive impact on overall cleanup goal is achieved.

Efforts must be made to minimize the use of chemical agents and to collect, contain, and recover all flushed oil. The provisions of the "RRT 6, Emergency Response Pre-Approval Guidelines to Decontaminate Vessel and Hard Structure in Coastal Port Areas" must be fully complied with in order to meet the requirements of these guidelines.

GENERAL PREPAREDNESS AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

ONE GULF PLAN UPDATE

The concept for the Area Contingency Plan (ACP) is based on the "One Texas Plan" and was developed by the Texas General Land Office and the United States Coast Guard. The "One Gulf Plan" has common portions of the ACP put into a single binder. Area specific information is placed into a separate binder called "Geographic Response Plan." The One Gulf Plan is formatted in the ICS format (1000-9000) series. The Geographic Response Plan provides content specific data for each area (Sensitive sites, Communications and Resources).

The benefits of the "One Gulf Plan" are as follows: Coordination across Area Committee boundaries creating regional consistency; Reduces production time and eliminates duplication of effort; ICS format supports responders ICS positions. The other major benefit of the One Gulf Plan is that only one contractor produces and assembles the plan for all regions (COASTAL). Each Area Committee owns their specific plan. Each specific plan is only as good as the information provided by the Area Committee.

PERSONNEL CHANGES

Mr. Charles A. Gazda will be retiring after forty years of federal civil service, twenty three years as USEPA Region 6, Chief, Emergency Response Branch. As the RRT 6 co-chair, he guided the RRT through the OSC Pre-approval process for dispersant, insitu burn, bioremediation implementation and many other site specific response technologies.

His counsel to the RRT will be missed and we wish him well. In his place, Mr. Ragan Broyles will be acting co-chair for Region 6, Regional Response Team.

ISSUES OR OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS REQUIRING NRT ATTENTION:

Need to ensure that FEMA provides CERCLA funding to states to cover travel cost to RRT meetings on a consistent basis.